By the river

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By the river

by qBox

Summary

Fishing is a favorite pastime for young Will Graham, having newly moved into a minor coast town and yet to befriend his classmates in the few early summer weeks leading up to vacation. The one youth that one day does take interest in him, though, might not be the safest or most suitable of company…

Or: A summer of making acquaintances and poor decisions.

June 17th

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

"What kinda name is Hannibal?" He asked, eyes peeled at the softly bobbing cork.

"I don't know, what kind of name is 'Will'?" the tall boy at his side answered, slowly, but with a strangely pointed edge to each word.

Will didn't know what kind of name it was.

"A verb and a noun both, from what I hear", Hannibal continued, but his tone wasn't mocking, not the way the other kids' would sound.

"It's just a name", Will muttered, bare feet rubbing at each other far above the water, uncomfortably.

"My thoughts exactly", Hannibal hummed, the near-shining patent-leather shoes reaching further down than Will's own much smaller feet.

Will watched them, seeing only that part of his company out of the corner of his eye. The glossy leather was more worn than it seemed at first glance, he noticed; the reason it was only near-shining was due to that. There was a smudgy look to it, and he realized it was a failed attempt to shine it further. Will's mind went to the frayed pair of sandals placed closely behind him, and he wondered when last he had worn patent-leather shoes - he didn't remember any pair from packing up in the new house. Barely remembered if he ever had had any. He wondered if they felt as stiff on the inside as they looked on the outside. He also wondered if the boy had been at the church nearby or attended a 'happening' somewhere with how well-dressed he was, especially for a late summer day. Dad called them parties. The lady that'd become their neighbor when they moved in was the one to say 'happenings', and Will had decided to remember the word. He wondered if the boy had left in a hurry, but he didn't voice those questions.

"Isn't that warm?" he asked instead and nodded his jaw towards them. He saw them move forwards slowly and align closely together before a small chuckle came from the owner.

"I hadn't given it thought", admitted Hannibal, but it sounded like he was smiling. He had an odd accent, too, but Will wasn't that good at telling them apart. Hadn't heard enough to know one from another, didn't know what exactly made them different from his. One girl at the new school had said he drawled his words at times, and he'd reminded himself to find out when he did and stop doing it. It wasn't easy.

Hannibal was talking about something, and Will hadn't paid attention, half-lidded eyes peering at the cork that refused to sink. He wasn't paying attention to *that* either, really.

"...lack...", was the first word Will caught up on. He blinked a few times and turned his head towards his still unexpected company.

Hannibal was several years older than him, just as his long legs had made Will suspect, with a blond so dark it was nearly a brownish black to his hair and a very distinguishable face. His collar had been starched, Will realized, remembering the one time his father had attempted something similar for the two of them. It hadn't worked out and they were still wrinkly when they showed up, he remembered, but what was the occasion?

"What?" he asked, voice shriller than he'd intended it to be.

A strong jaw turned towards him over the collar that he still scanned, and thin lips opened into a smile.

"I merely asked if you weren't upset by the apparent lack of fish", he said and Will looked up, up into his eyes.

He found himself in the midst of the river, the stream picking up around his waist, hitting his knees from behind, threatening to buckle them beneath him with sheer force. Growing taller and taller around him the waves turned on the well that was his existence and submerged him, and all he saw was fish.

He blinked and moved his gaze away from the maroon before him before nodding, quickly. He shook his head, too. Counted the buttons in Hannibal's white and spot free shirt, counted again. Dad said counting something in his vicinity would help, and it did. Hannibal spoke again and this time his tone was gentle, questioning.

"Would you prefer it if I left?"

He hadn't really asked if he could sit down in the first place but Will hadn't minded too much, so long as he spoke lightly and didn't frighten the fish. Now he wanted to leave?

Maybe it was true what the boy in his last school said, he wasn't very easy to talk to. Wasn't worth the effort. He wished it was just dumb words though, like Dad had said.

"No", he mumbled, hastily as though Hannibal was about to leave. In reality he hadn't even moved a muscle. "You can stay, I just... have troubles... with talking. Being social."

He was repeating the words he'd heard said at multiple parent-teacher meetings, but at least it was true. It certainly felt true. Hannibal hummed next to him and turned his face back towards the water, to his relief and disappointment both.

"I find that often one's own mind is one's best conversation partner", he said after a while and Will nodded, hands gripping the fishing rod, small fingers wrapping around it.

"It gives the answers you want", he agreed, lower lip between his teeth in focus as he pulled back the string to check if the worm was still threaded on the hook. It wasn't, and he added a new, squirming one from the plastic bucket. "Not … necessarily... good ones though", he added after throwing it out again.

"Perhaps it needs practice to become a better conversationalist."

"Maybe."

"Do you fish here often?" The question followed his previous response so closely Will was certain the question was premeditated. He didn't mind being asked the questions though; being on the receiving end didn't require him to uphold the conversation himself.

"Recently, yeah. Dad taught me", he could hear the pride in his own voice and the small grin on his lips. "Plus, nobody comes to scare'm off. The other kids... Dennis' mom got him a Genesis so everyone's at his place."

He neglected to explain why he wasn't joining, and that he seldom had company out here anyway, but Hannibal didn't prod. It felt nice.

"I will try not to frighten the fish", said Hannibal, a small laugh to his words that didn't feel mean-spirited at all - *that* felt nice as well. Will didn't let himself think about the eyes, though, the imaginary waves still crushing his equally imaginary bones.

There was something akin to familiarity between them, despite only having just met and despite Will's certainty that he had never seen the boy before in his life. For a moment he felt his own loneliness reflecting in the other, the solitude of arriving to an empty house at the end of the day. He wondered what kind of family Hannibal was from, what their living room looked like, if their neighbor also had a little dog that yipped at the smallest intrusions or noises – but he didn't ask.

"You probably don't", he hurried to answer instead. "They're just being difficult some days. 'Sides I don't really fish to catch a bunch of them in the first hand."

"It is not the main objective, then? Fish for fun, not for profit?" Hannibal asked and Will could almost hear the amused raise of his eyebrows in the tone.

"Yeah something like that", Will answered, but he wasn't sure what 'profit' meant. He placed it among new words he'd ask his dad about in the evening. "It's fun... to see what happens."

"What about if you catch them then? A fish hook isn't kind and playful, Will. Especially not when lodged in the cheek of a bass."

One bass had had its entire face torn up, Will remembered. It had been scarred from before too, that one. An uncomfortable memory. Dad had said maybe that day they'd caught the King of the river... But it was far away from this town, and long ago now.

"I don't throw them back once I catch them", he defended himself. "That would just be ... It'd be a waste."

"You tore it out of its environment and wounded it, might as well eat it", nodded Hannibal slowly at his side. The sun seemed to reflect its heat on him, the soft warmth of his body tingling against Will's bare and scraped elbow.

"Yeah. Dad gets happy too, when I get the big ones. 'We'll have fish for weeks!' he says. Makes it sound like he's complaining but he's not, I'd know."

"I certainly do hope you have food other than bass", Hannibal said, maroon eyes fixed at the cork that kept softly bobbing.

"Oh we do. Plenty things. Burgers and sausage and all. Pancakes just this morning."

Hannibal's laugh was low as though it was in secret, and Will wasn't sure which part he was amused by. Before he gathered enough courage to ask however, the older boy seemed to straighten up next to him.

"Your worm seems to be considered an adequate lunch out there", he commented, and when Will sat up properly he could see it too. The big shadow under the streaming water circling his attempt at a cork, closing in on the lure, unsuspecting.

He tightened his grip on the wooden rod, a watchful eye on the shadow. It was large, but he knew it wasn't the biggest he'd seen. The water would make it less proportionate to the real deal, Dad had said.

They were in complete, nearly breathless silence for seconds that seemed to drag on for hours. When the cork went under, Will began reeling it in, quick and stressed. This part was always difficult, to get the catch up before it managed to tear free. Dad knew from experience every knack and turn, but Will was not nearly as skilled a fisherman. His arms were too small, not strong enough to get it with ease.

But he did, and the bass broke the surface of the river, its fins striking it hard enough to direct a thin wave up on the wooden dock. Will reached out to grab it, and missed as its panicked flailing shook the line and swung it away from his hand.

He saw its non-blinking eyes staring back at him, behind him, away from him as though it couldn't focus. Then, a larger, slim hand clasped around its shiny, slick surface and secured it on the dock.
Hannibal removed the hook quickly but carefully from the fish's mouth, unaffected by its slippery scales even as its tail fins smacked against the wood, splashing the water off of itself onto its surroundings. Will only watched his hands move, and move fast, as the boy lifted the bass again. A twist of his hands and a barely audible crack, and the fish stopped struggling altogether.
The river, the birds, their breath, natural noises were all that remained for a moment.

"Thanks", Will said, almost too suddenly and looked up towards his company's face again. Hannibal smiled, a closed one first before his lips separated to show his teeth. The gentle laughter that came with it almost felt as though it echoed inside of Will and before he knew it he was laughing along. What a sight they were, huge, damp spots covering their legs and lower stomachs. Will's t-shirt was already patterned with dirt and so the new addition didn't matter much, but they certainly made a mess out of Hannibal's well-ironed dress shirt. His cuffs had small stains of pink from removing the hook.

"No thanks necessary", answered Hannibal between the chuckles and handed him the fish. It was large, still, despite being out of the water's enlarging surface.

Definitely the biggest he'd ever caught, Will knew and said it as well while placing it in the other bucket, though after some thought added:

"... That we caught."

He'd lured it, and Hannibal had caught it. It wasn't fair to give himself all of the praise, was it?

"He must have been hungry, for that dish to interest him", grinned Hannibal and Will laughed again, accomplished, before laying himself down on his back on the dock.

Letting the sun dry his wet clothes, he laid still apart from his giggles, as he heard Hannibal do the same next to him. The squish of wet socks inside the patent-leather shoes was audible too and had them snickering in unison. Everything felt giddy, and Will couldn't quite remember when last he'd had this much fun in the company of another human. The dogs were another story.

"Next time, you be barefoot too", he said, rushed the words out before he could stop it.

He tilted his head to rest on his left ear, watching the face that turned to face him in turn. He allowed himself to meet his eyes again, too, but felt more securely grounded this time, the shine in them friendly... maybe even excited.

"You are inviting me to join you, then?" the older boy asked, trying to remain polite, and Will felt himself grin back despite becoming increasingly more nervous.

"If you want. I'm here when...when I don't have school. Come by if you want." He spoke quickly and looked up towards the bright skies again, counted the clouds - it didn't take long. The silence lasted longer, and he had time to count them five times over before Hannibal spoke up again.

"Spending time here is likely to be amusing", he said. "It would be my pleasure."

A voice then interrupted, a woman, calling Hannibal's name from behind the bushes, some distance away. It broke through the happy blur that had begun to fill Will's mind and startled them both to sit up, Hannibal at a much slower pace.

Words that Will couldn't recognize as English sounded towards them, all he knew is that they were definitely questions. Hannibal seemed to understand, replying effortlessly and standing up, his dress pants more wrinkled than they had been at his arrival.

Will found himself wanting to stop him again, but he was tongue-tied. *Amusing*, his mind echoed. *Pleasure*, it said as well. He got up on his knees as though to follow him but Hannibal’s movements were faster than his own.

"I’ll have to be going", he said, a hand ruffling through Will's wild locks before he walked away, briskly in his damp patent-leather shoes.

Chapter End Notes

Hey, I'm back at it again with my writing practise, haha.
I hope this will be interesting to someone at least! Please don't be afraid to comment on what you think, I'd appreciate it!
(Please do keep in mind that English is not my first language, and I have no beta, so if there is something written hilariously wrong I'd like to know too.)

Also I saw Will's age being stated as 34 on the wiki, but not during which season that'd be in. Maybe it says somewhere else?
Either way I hope I won't mess up the characters too much, though I might be writing Hannibal a little more like the adult than youth one.

I'll try to keep this updated somewhat regularly at least, please enjoy!

June 24th

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Though the other children seemed overjoyed in anticipation of the incoming summer, the distinctly repetitive days seemed to float together in Will's mind. School days began, passed, and ended in the new, to him unfamiliar building with its scratched desks and polished floors. The teacher held his lectures with the same straight posture and thin line of a mouth, decidedly choosing not to notice the way Will's new classmate shot him too many glances and not enough words, or the appearance of a bluish tint around his left eye around the end of the week.

Perhaps, Will guessed, that part should count as a break from the repetition, but preferred not to think of it much. The teacher's words, the lessons, the different subjects, his classmates, the hands forcing his arm to bend uncomfortably behind him, all events of the week blended with the warm, relentless air, and blurred together. He put the focus he could gather directed towards his classes when necessary, but every so often his mind ran off elsewhere.

It ran to the neighbor's little dog, the small tail wagging excitedly when he came by, its paws muddy with dirt from the small garden. Or, it ran down to the river and its surrounding greenery. He could nearly feel the rough wooden surface of the fishing rod in his hands, scoot out to the far edge of the dock, his toes reaching down just barely enough to measure the temperature of the water. It would always be colder than he'd have preferred.

There was something lacking at that river now, he'd come to realize. An astounding lack of company after the previous Saturday's meeting, and the continuous lack of appearance by the older boy.

"Hannibal", he mumbled under his breath as he'd made himself comfortable come Saturday again, his brow lightly furrowed. Hannibal, who said his company would be amusing.

Hannibal, who hadn't showed.

He rubbed aimlessly at the bruise on his arm, the numb ache from it and the black eye a result of the previous day's encounter. Something about being weirdly silent, something else about a misdeed not forgotten. Dad hadn't seen them yet, thankfully, late home and early to work as he was most days, and Will was glad for it. It would be an uncomfortable conversation, anyway.

A heavy tug at the fishing line caught him off guard and he looked up only to see the cork go below the surface. He got to his knees, hurrying to pull the line back and hoist it out of the water, despite the rabid struggles of the overwhelming weight. A flip to its fin splashed his knees and thighs but he didn't care; he heard the line snap and saw the massive bass vanish below the surface.

Bait, hook and line, gone with the escapee.

Staring after it in disbelief, he felt his mouth curl involuntarily and the sting behind his eyes, annoyed and frustrated. It wasn't as though it was the only hook he owned, but he wasn't sure he'd brought any others with him.

"Where are you at?", he muttered again, looking through his bucket for possible replacements. The line had thankfully not snapped too far up, so it didn't need to be switched just yet, but the hook…

There was footsteps behind him, but once he heard them, they were already up close.

"*Je suis ici*", said Hannibal, and sat by his side again.

When Will looked over he noticed that the older boy was observing him, nearly looking him up and down. He fell back to sit on his calves, putting the bucket behind him, his eyes into the water.

"What does that mean?" he asked after a few moments of silence. "You said it last week too. To the lady."

He wanted to put weight on the words *last week*, wanted to remind the other that he hadn't showed up since then, but knew that it hadn't been a promise. It was surprising him enough that Hannibal arrived now, honestly. In the corner of his eye, he sneaked some glances over towards the other.

Hannibal seemed perplexed only for a split second, and then the edges of his mouth raised if only just barely noticeably.

"A linguistic slip of the tongue, I am afraid", he said, and Will shrugged. He didn't know the word.

"Why?"

"In our household my aunt and I speak French to keep her secondary as strong as her third is growing; the same is applicable for myself", Hannibal clarified slowly, long fingers braided over his thighs and feet crossed over the whirling water. He wasn't barefoot, but his shoes weren't patent leather this time, just regular dress shoes, Will noted. Dad had a pair of those tucked into the closet, rarely used.

"Oh", he said, trying to save time to find something better to say. "I don't speak French", he ended up with and heard an amused hum from Hannibal in response.

"As would be expected. Here."

Hannibal's hand grasped his loosely and moved it over to lay in it on its back. In turn, Will made a half-hearted attempt at pulling it back to himself, but the curiosity won and he remained still and observant.

"*Je*", Hannibal said softly and stroke his fingers across Will's palm in the shape of the letters of the word. "It means 'I'."

Will found himself smiling nervously, fingers twitching, threatening to close.

“It tickles”, he said as Hannibal wrote another word.

“*Suis* means *am,* it is formed according to present tense and the subject pronoun”, he explained and Will nodded, pretty sure of where the sentence was going by now.

“The last word is *here* right?” he asked, shuffling to let his legs dangle off the dock edge as well.

Hannibal lifted his finger, breaking its contact with the soft flesh, and made a motion to erase his previous pseudo-notes from Will’s smaller palm, his face unchanging.

“Yes, that would be it.” His fingers wandered up his arm, softly touching the bruise that had formed in the distinct form of fingers, and Will was torn out of his amusement even by the ever-so-slight pressure. It wasn’t too overwhelming of a pain and in fact subsided quickly once the pressure diminished, but he pulled his arm back to himself either way and pretended to focus on the broken line instead. It needed switching, he decided again. He’d have to do that when he came home.

“Are we not fishing today?” Hannibal eventually asked, gesturing towards the water. His eyes, however, nearly felt like they burnt into the side of Will’s face, filling him with something akin to discomfort, unable to return the gaze. He shook his head instead.

“No”, he said and his voice was stronger than the mutter he’d originally intended. “The line broke, last fish took the hook with him when he left.”

“A wild and strong-willed one, then. Postponed his fate for another day.” There was amusement in his tone as though they were shaped by a small smile, and Will found himself grinning at the stupidity of the situation too. It couldn’t be helped, the line was broken. If Hannibal had come only to fish with him, he’d have to remain disappointed.

But the older boy frankly didn’t seem to be too upset about the lack of fishing line; he was looking out across the river again and Will held back a sigh of relief.

“Would it be safe to assume *those* were not the fish’s work, though?”

The secret sigh turned into a clump in his throat. He swallowed, then forced himself to meekly nod in reply. Peeking up towards Hannibal’s face, it still was as emotionless as could be, but he slightly returned the nod.

“Who?”

“A kid at school.”

“I see.”

He wasn’t scolding, nor was he coddling. It made Will feel strangely at ease, and he wondered if these differing emotions were his, or something he could sense from the other.

Perhaps his own and Hannibal's were exchanging within him – it had happened to him before with others.

Then the older boy spoke up again.

"The human race is intriguing", he said. "Through both fishing and hunting, their ancestors evolved and became predators. They nurtured their skills in both before they learnt to tame and utilize critter to sustain themselves; growing stronger based on their cunning minds and capture strategies. Collect a wild calf while it's still young and impressionable, and you may foster its dependency and trust."

Will found himself watching him as he spoke, unsure what to respond and where Hannibal was going, but intrigued by the words he chose and the odd way he said them. Jumping droplets from the swirling river under his feet tickled his soles, but apart from that the water, the missing hook, all of it was far away from his mind.

"However", continued Hannibal, his eyes wandering over something across the stream. "While the human race evolved into predators, they simultaneously still were prey. The larger animals with their claws and fangs were a danger to them to a much higher degree than they themselves were to their own prey. A bear had the weaker running; one human of a more predator-like instinct could also have the same effect on the prey."

Are you calling me weak? Will wanted to ask, indignant by the accusation, but the words were stuck on his lips and he wasn't sure what tone to use.

"The predators in a group will see themselves as stronger than their prey, and use it against them", said Hannibal, and Will only nodded. He knew and recognized it from both recent and previous experiences, few as they were. Then the older boy added: "Perhaps you should change it around."

Will shook his head and braided his fingers like the other had. It felt clumsy.

"I won't tell the teachers. If I don't, they'll bore of it eventually, they'll stop. That's how they work, I, I know that …" He couldn't just tell him how clearly aware he was of how they worked, couldn't explain how well he understood the way they acted. "If I tell, it's like…"

His voice faded out and he watched his feet dangle off the pier, bare and so much smaller than the clothed one at his side.

"…coal to their fire?" Hannibal asked, his voice a gentle hum. Will nodded, finding it as good of an explanation as any.

"Yeah", he said when noting that the other didn't look directly at him, maybe couldn't see it.

"Do they frighten you, Will?"

The question tugged at something in his stomach that Will had done his best to ignore for years, and he felt his teeth clench up from the denial he wanted to voice. But something told him that even if he lied, Hannibal might know it wasn't true.

“Yes”, he croaked out eventually, and tilted his head down, forcing his eyes shut to control the burn behind them. He felt the fingers trace over his arm again, circle the bruise there.

He looked up, met the maroon eyes much quicker than he would have liked, and felt the world sway beneath him if only for a moment. He almost expected the waves to come crashing in on him again during it, but before anything could happen he was no longer overwhelmed. The hand raised towards his face, its thumb outlining the dark circle around the side of his eye, softly pressing as if to make him aware of it.

“Why don’t you frighten them instead?” Hannibal suggested, an eyebrow raised in what seemed like amusement, but not directed towards Will himself – rather to the idea.

And Will felt himself smile back at it, an unsettled one but a smile nonetheless.

“How’s that going to work?” he asked.

“If there is no use in telling the responsible ones anyway, and if their poor manners continue further, one way to deter them would be to fight them back. Take their role. Become them.”

“I am pretty good at becoming people”, Will felt himself blurt out without consideration. He immediately regretted it; Dad had said to rein his wild imagination, especially after his guesses on his peers’ and older acquaintances’ actual actions had become too accurate.

He wasn’t sure why it was bad, but it was something to keep to oneself.

Hannibal watched him studiously and then nodded.

“But”, said Will and moved over to look at the water again. “I don’t think I should. I’d prefer to make some friends among them, once they’re done with whatever they’re up to now. Friends… are good to have.”

“If that is what you believe”, Hannibal said and changed the subject, to which Will was grateful.

They spoke of the different fish he had found in the stream, specifically in comparison to what he could find by the coastline. The conversation passed several subjects that Will found himself strangely in control of. He retold him what his dad had taught him about lures, about live and non-live bait, about different hooks and tricks for different fish. He named what he’d caught so far in this very river, too; trout, smallmouths, and the multitudes of non-fish items that would catch onto his hook.

“I actually caught a shoe once”, he admitted and watched the corners of Hannibal’s mouth raise before the small laughter sipped out. He joined into it. “No clue who it belonged to, it was an adult’s but who drops their shoes in the river?”

“Perhaps it wasn’t intentional”, Hannibal hummed behind the smile, and then straightened his back as though listening for something in the distance. Will found himself do the same, but he couldn’t hear anything over the murmuring water.

“What’s wrong?” he asked eventually and Hannibal lightly shook his head.

“It is very faint, but I believe the church bells are ringing. At this hour, we should both probably be returning to our homes.”

Will wasn’t sure what time it was, but the day definitely had fallen into afternoon while they’d been there, and he knew it wouldn’t be long until Dad was meant to come back from work. Dinner, a second read-through of the newspaper and the regular evening routine.

But he didn’t want to let him see the bruises, not yet.

“…Do you need to go just now?” he asked when Hannibal made an effort to stand again, and actually got the words out this time. The maroon eyes studied him again, in the way that prickled his skin and made his mouth dry, watching him for a seemingly long time. Perhaps it wasn’t an appropriate question in their recent acquaintanceship, Will realized and began mouthing an apology before the words could even form.

“…I would love to stay yet a while if you wished it of me, *mon cher garçon”*, Hannibal said, fingers ruffling his hair softly as he stood. “But I have somewhere to be.”

“Oh”, said Will, the word more of a noise than anything else. He wasn’t as disappointed as he’d thought he’d be, understanding the reason.

“However, tomorrow is supposed to be an equally lovely day. I’m planning to join you if you do come here; hopefully you’ll be able to find another hook in the meantime.”

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for reading another chapter, I hope you enjoyed it! And also, thank you so much for the kudos and comments so far, some of my favourite mail notifications are definitely those from AO3. Please don't be afraid to comment what you think, it's both uplifting and helpful!

Will is making acquaintances that honestly are not good for anyone to make. As per usual, haha.
Also, French is not one of the languages I have learnt, so if I butcher it with translators I am sorry.

Also, if you feel like listening to it too, these are some of what I've been listening to while writing:
The Album Leaf - Window (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-uZpl8ii2d0)
Unravel OST (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8qGH8fP33Tc)

June 25th

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Dad had come home much later than planned, and left at the break of dawn to head back to the boatyard. He had muttered something about a customer paying highly to have their wreck of a boat fixed up before the end of the weekend, and been too busy heating up a TV dinner while Will hurried to get ready for bed to notice anything different. It was a relief, honestly.

Will left the rugged row-house, their moving boxes still stacked in the corner of the hall and the walls blank and empty, and locked the door with the spare key before hiding it under the first step of the short staircase. The neighbor's dog caught sight of him when he passed their thin garden and stood with its small paws against the gate, happily wagging.

"Hey there Tucker", Will said, the small Lakeland terrier jumping in excitement in response. He found himself laughing and reached out to pet it over the gate, stroking its square-ish head. Tucker licked his fingers in hope for snacks, but showed no disappointment at the lack thereof. "You be good alright?"

He'd grown fond of the mutt quickly – he always did – and sometimes helped out his owner by taking him for walks. The rewards of soft biscuits and apple pieces wasn't as enticing to him as the walk itself was, of course, but he definitely didn't disagree to them.

He gave Tucker a few helpful scratches behind the ear, and carried on towards the river, his fishing rod in one hand and bucket in the other. Perhaps it'd been a good thing to lose the hook, he pondered, throwing some glances towards the new, much shinier one. He hoped it could catch the fish's attention better.

When he eventually arrived at the partially reeling dock, Hannibal was to his surprise already seated at its margin. He was bent forwards, focused on a thick sketchbook in his lap and a piece of charcoal between long fingers. With how still he sat, he seemed nearly statuesque. Will had stopped right before the creaking planks could make a noise to signal his arrival, but Hannibal seemed to sense the company either way, raising his head.

"Good morning, Will", he said, voice soft and welcoming, and then turned to watch him.

"How did you know it was me?" Will found himself asking, now coming over to the edge. He stepped out of his sandals, and slid down next to him, readying the buckets and boxes he'd brought.

"Intuition", smiled Hannibal before returning his gaze towards the papers before him. "And, dare I say, a tad of logic. Doubtlessly you're this dock's most frequent attendant."

"Could be", Will agreed, placing a squirming worm on his hook before he dangled it out across the river, and lowered it until the cork reached the surface. He found himself curious as to what Hannibal was drawing, but while it would be easily viewed by sneaking a glance

his way he decided against it to be polite. *Can't be easy to draw with an observer*, he thought and kept his eyes at the cork instead.

A soft but distinguishable inhale from his side broke the silence once it had passed for several minutes, and Hannibal spoke up.

"Has your family procured a dog, Will?"

"No", Will answered, mindlessly, before his head cleared. "…Why do you ask?"

"There's a certain scent I do not normally associate with you", Hannibal said with such ease it almost seemed a regular thing to say. Then again, Tucker did smell strongly – Will suspected the dog needed a bath even though it wasn't that bad of a smell, and grinned at the thought.

"My neighbor has a dog", he explained, unable to keep the excitement out of his voice. "His name is Tucker, I take care of him sometimes. Take him on walks, play with him. His owner's old, she can't do much of that anymore so it helps her, she said."

"You enjoy dogs?"

"They're my favorite", Will nodded. "I wish we had one but Dad says we can't afford keeping one. Not yet, at least. I'll get like… seven, when I grow up."

He heard the soft laughter from the side and joined in with more ease than he'd expected.

"Certainly they do add something to a house and a home", Hannibal admitted once the chuckle had subsided, and switched pages in his sketchbook. "Wordless family members to keep the others company."

"Yeah, they're a great kind of family", Will nodded. "Super loving, too. Always waiting for their owners to come home."

"Would you need that company, Will?" Hannibal asked, as casually as if he'd asked about the weather. "When you come home at the end of your fishing trips and school days, who waits for you?"

Will wondered whether it was a strange thing to ask overall, or if it was just a strange time to ask it. He knew with ease what it was meant to say, though. *Are you lonely?*

"It's just dad and me", he answered eventually, committed to join along in the questioning. It was an alright kind of conversation after all. This was how people *socialized*, right? "And dad works real late sometimes, so I'm kinda the one waiting for him to come home. Not all the time though. But it's alright, I have some books, and the landlord said it shouldn't be long until the cable TV starts working right. Something about the previous owner not paying, I don't know. It's just static and noise on the screen when you start it right now though."

"*Myrornas krig*", said Hannibal and Will blinked up towards him in question. "It's apparently a Swedish term for the noise; *the war of ants*. Perhaps to make it seem more interesting."

“Oh.” Will turned back towards the softly bobbing cork. It wasn’t even close to sinking; maybe today was just one of those days. “It would probably be more interesting to watch a real war between ants, though, than staring at static.”

“Definitely”, agreed Hannibal. “Though that would possibly be accurate for some of the content on the channels as well.”

Giggles left Will’s mouth; imagining Hannibal by a TV set made for such a strange vision. He could almost sense the smile on the other’s lips too, were it by the sound of his breathing changing or if the emotion simply radiated towards him the way it so often did.

“When you sit there late at night and await your father’s arrival, does it feel like the home of a family?” The words were still said with the tone of a smile.

“What kinda thing to ask…”, Will began to protest, mid-laugh, but his words fizzled out, his hands holding onto the fishing rod increasingly hard.

“Consider it, please.”

The silence deepened between them, accompanied only by the birds in the distance, the ripple of the river and a constant scratching from Hannibal’s charcoal. Will thought about the many small apartments and houses they’d lived in so far, thought about his grandparents’ loud whispers to his dad that *these aren’t good living conditions for a child his age* when they thought the subject of their conversation was sleeping. Promises that *soon, soon I’ll be somewhere where we can stay for a longer time*.

“Perhaps”, he whispered eventually, and before his eyes the cork finally sank beneath the surface.

He gave a quick shout of surprise, and got to his feet to reel it in, taking precautions that turned out to be unnecessary. It went much more painlessly this time, the fish small and its struggles in vain against his surge of energy.

“Your father taught you fishing, though”, said Hannibal calmly, closing his sketchbook to secure it from the water and looking up towards him. “It’s an admirable lesson, and one fitting for family to do.”

Will nodded, unhooking the floundering creature from the line, and grabbing a stern hold of it to end its struggle. It was decidedly smaller than their previous catch, but still large enough to make for parts of a meal.

“Yeah, he’s great. He taught me the basics, we used to go out a lot”, he agreed, feeling a bit more positive about the subject again, and dropped the fish down into the bucket. “Sometimes in lakes, sometimes in the big sea. I don’t know how but he gets *loads*...”

“Do you recall the first time he brought you out?” Hannibal asked, his voice as soft as the summer breeze. Will nodded. “Is his method to simply lay them on the ground to stop breathing, or…?”

“Oh no, he taught me how you crack’em”, Will stated, almost proudly. His dad had taught him so many things on this subject, and it was his favorite hobby to take pride in. But then, he felt his stomach twist with concern, and realized he was reluctant to hear what the next question would be.

“Since you do recall the first time he brought you out, do you also remember the first time you saw your father kill a fish?” Hannibal asked, and it was a simpler question than Will had expected, but it still had his face crinkle up. He wasn’t sure why Hannibal’s questions would always surround these topics. He also wasn’t sure why he didn’t mind them much despite it all.

“I do”, he said, hesitantly.

“How did it feel?”

“Strange.” This time the word came instinctively, almost a bit too fast. In his gut the memory stung, despite having repeated the same action several times since. “He put it on a big flat rock while he was getting, I don’t know, his hands clean, something. It was just jumping. And then, when he… did, it just wasn’t anymore.”

“Was it attempting to get back into the water?”

“Desperately.” The word felt uncomfortable on Will’s tongue and he wondered if he’d ever used it in speech, or if he’d only heard it and seen it written. “I worried it’d make its way back and if I had to catch it before that, but it didn’t.”

In the thoughtful silence following the words, a large bird landed on the opposite shore, hopping around the rocks. It slipped, but caught itself and flew off again, and Will felt the discomfort grow vaguer from the change of focus. Hannibal’s hands were grasping his sketch book again, drawing something Will, again, managed not to focus on.

“It’s fascinating”, he heard the older boy say, and listened. “The pure predator consumes its prey thoughtlessly, but that doesn’t mean we cannot wonder about their reason. Is it by instinct they know they must hunt, as their way to sustain themselves? Of course most are taught by their respective earlier generations, such being the case with you and your father… but their first inkling of what to do seems integrated in their nature, whispered through their genes by some force of nature. God, maybe.”

“Does God really do that?” Will found himself asking, throwing the line back out into the water with new bait. “The priests say He was the one that *made* everything.”

“As easily as He makes, He could also take away, *mon cher garçon*, be it by His own hand or through His creatures. That must be one of His favorite pastimes, with how often He does it.”

Will couldn’t pride himself on religious knowledge, and though his dad had sometimes brought him to church, their visits were rare. The priests told so many stories and he really couldn’t keep track of them, but even though he remembered them to be dark and unsettling they still had him equally as fascinated as Hannibal’s odd choices of subject did.

“Does he want to?” he asked once the silence became a heavier cloud than he wanted it to be.

“To take? Most definitely – doing it so often, He must relish in the action. And His creations follow these instincts – the predators for their food, and some of them for their own enjoyment. The human race, created in His image, is among the few to take pleasure in both, and so, as does He. When Isaac was bound on Moriah, was it not for God’s personal amusement, to see whether Abraham would actually kill him?”

“He stopped him”, Will pointed out, trying to remember correctly.

“The reason still stands.”

There it was again, the small smile on Hannibal’s lips. Will hadn’t even been aware that he was watching him until he noticed the corners lift, and upon the realization they had already locked eyes – and the water rose around Will’s feet, threatening dangerously close to pull at his ankles.

But it stayed there, and he let it stay there.

Inside of him the questions were welling up higher than the waves, questions that he normally could *guess* the answer to without needing to voice them. *Wild imagination*, Dad had called it with a soft voice and strong arms wrapping him into a protective embrace. *Lucky guesses. Don’t put all of your trust in that, son, it doesn’t make you know a person. Talking to people, now that’s important.*

It had frustrated him; he had been right so many times, wouldn’t that be enough? But here he was now, unable to keep up his kind of one-sided communication – and he clung to Hannibal’s soothing voice and oddly cadenced words as if they were a lifeline in the stormy waters around his ankles. Will wondered, as their conversation shifted to simpler subjects, if the older boy found amusement in sharing his thoughts with a kid his age, if he was even religious, or simply used the stories as examples.

With Dad’s friends and workmates, with the kids in his class, with Grandpa and with the teachers, he would usually have an idea. Here it could be either, and it was wildly fascinating.

He asked what drawing with charcoal was like, and Hannibal let him try it on a blank new page in the sketchbook while he held onto the rod. No fish pulled at the bait, but it wasn’t their focus. Will fumbled with the coal as he struggled to draw Tucker – the face got larger on one side than the other and looked as if stung by a bee swarm, but Hannibal complimented his effort and offered to seal it so it wouldn’t smudge.

The rod eventually forgotten at their side on the dock, they laid down on the wood as Hannibal let him draw more things to the amusement of both of them. Above them, the sun kept travelling, heating their backs with its warmth through the passing of the day, and Will wondered only briefly if this what it was like to have a friend.

Chapter End Notes

A slightly longer chapter and Hannibal always takes conversations a little too far.
Meanwhile, Will needs better friends.

Thank you still for all the nice comments and the kudos, I'm so excited to see what you think of the chapters!
Also, I have notes written down for further chapters, but since offline life is still a little busy I hope I can still keep to a more-or-less weekly schedule.

Either way, I hope you enjoy!

July 4th

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Through the first days of the summer break, Will either joined his dad to work, helping him fix up the boat he'd been tasked with by handing him the correct tools when asked to, or went out to the river or another open stream to fish together. The heat was picking up, but while the air indoors was becoming heavy and wet, outside the breeze still allowed for some sanctuary.

Dad spoke vigorously about electrical fans and how he'd get them a new, working one once they could afford it, and Will remembered in turn how strange people's voices got when they spoke right into them. He remembered that more than he did the breeze coming from it.

Often his thoughts went to the Hannibal, who he'd never seen anywhere but by the river – especially when he and his dad sat there in the cool evening. The water ran low and unthreatening, and that together with the different company, Will had begun to wonder where Hannibal spent his early summer days – if he also had a break from some school, and whether he was even studying.

"What does *mon cher garçon* mean?" he'd asked into the air, trying his best with the pronunciation the way he remembered it, and it took a few minutes for his dad to react.

"… Is that French?" Mr. Graham had asked, in turn, grinning widely. "Where did you pick that up?"

Will didn't know why he didn't tell him about Hannibal, but it didn't feel like he should. As though, if he were to tell anyone about the older boy, he'd vanish mysteriously like a character in a fairy tale.

When Dad eventually had to go back to work, Will decided not to join him, but said in the morning that he'd stay behind instead and *play with some friends*. With poorly hidden excitement, Dad spent their breakfast asking what the kids were like and to be careful if they played down by the river. Playing along, Will told him what little he knew – or rather; what he had *understood*, what he had *guessed*. That Dennis' mom imported game consoles that hadn't come out in the US yet, but that Will hadn't visited to play yet. That Heather had *so many* siblings, and Jesse's dad was a hunter.

What he didn't tell him, was that Dennis' mom likely didn't come home often, and wanted to indulge her son whenever she did; that Heather always talked loudly as if she wanted to outvote the rest of their voices, and that Jesse knew each and every part of a shotgun and drew them constantly.

When he left the row-house this time, locking the door and hiding the key, his mind travelled ahead of him towards the river. It was a Tuesday, and he wasn't sure whether Hannibal would

show up – he hadn't even during the weekend, and to his disappointment he had realized that they never had talked about how they'd meet up.

It wasn't even an "*if*" now, he realized with an excited heat up his neck as he mindlessly petted Tucker's long head in passing the gate. A friendly lick had him stay with the dog for a moment longer, and after a short and stuttering conversation with the dog's owner, he was granted some apple pieces in a paper wrap to bring to the river. The old lady kindly wished him best of luck, and despite his distracted state, Will could feel her eyes full with concern on his back when he left.

The summer day was decent, though, and he quickly let memories that would usually linger fall from his shoulders to lay left behind in the dirt. The apple pieces he began and finished almost all of during the trip. The late morning sun already was shining strongly, and he felt the trickle of sweat down his neck from where it burnt the worst. He'd get a farmer's tan in no time, a real itchy and painful one, he knew it.

On the path towards the riverside, three other children passed him on their staggering, old bikes; the chinstraps of their helmets barely wedged into the lock, one had his hanging off the handlebar, voices loud that still only broke through to him when they were already close. The rattling of colorful beads on their spokes got louder as one slowed down and grabbed a hold of his fishing rod, another swatted at his shoulder.

"Where are you going Graham? Gonna try to *catch* some food?" mocked Dennis' voice and Will had to hurry up as the rod strained, fearful it'd break, before it was freed with a soft *twang* to his great relief.

"Try the store instead you cheapskate!" Travis chimed in, but then they rode on down the road, leaving only their self-satisfied laughter behind.

It didn't really bother Will that much, especially not after making sure nothing on the rod had broken. But despite telling himself that, and adding that their insults weren't even good, his cheeks were flaming red. He blamed it on the glaring sun, and hoped it'd get better once he broke off the road and down the path to the riverside.

"Forget them, right?" he said to the trees when they leant in, throwing their shadow upon him, and he spent some minutes under their branches. Passing by taller bundles of grass, he tore up some strands while he walked and threw it in the air above him. The long, yellowing pieces landed everywhere; in his hair, on his clothes, and face, and in his bucket. In his mind, they turned into those ridiculous beads on the boys' bikes.

For a moment he could imagine them still following him, from how loudly he could hear them next to the colorful ornaments and their rattle. Some of the noises of his memory blended with the sound of cloven hooves and the rustling of wings in the forest surrounding him, a musical of noises that fitted poorly together. Ignoring the noise, he wondered whether the other children were heading towards a chosen destination, or if they were just on their bikes because of the sheer *fun* of it.

Friends spending their summer together, and there he was.

What would he have been doing if he was in a group like they were?

Briefly, his thoughts went to some previous schools' classmates that he'd gotten along well with, gone to movies, played games with – but then, a tall figure, well-combed and wide-shouldered, gently pushed them to the sides. *Hannibal*, he thought, and allowed himself again to wonder if they could be called friends.

What do friends do?

He doubted that Hannibal would be one to go on bike rides like Dennis and his friends did, doubted that he'd want to go watch the new *Ghost Busters* like Heather loudly had claimed her and her friends to have done recently. It didn't fit with the tall boy with the strange but intriguing questions and subjects, who drew with charcoal and who didn't care much about television. No, Hannibal was a different kind of person than others were. And Will wanted to talk to him more.

But, despite Will's hoping to see him at the dock this time, the area was abandoned apart from some quickly fleeing squirrels and some dragonflies passing him by. He felt himself sigh before he even knew that he was going to, and headed out towards his regular spot, resigned.

There was something there, though. A brown folder tied together by a flat, deep red string, its entirety held down by a rock the size of Will's fist, making it easy for him to remove it when curiosity hit, but less easy for the folder to be taken by the wind before his arrival.

Will put the bucket and fishing rod down mindlessly when he picked up the folder to look closer at it. In the bottom right corner of the thicker front page, he could see his name without even coming that close. The letters were beautifully curved and adorned without being illegible, and written in an ink much darker than any of Dad's mechanical pens held. *Will*.

He untied the bow the string had been fashioned into as carefully as he could not to break it, and perhaps even held his breath when he opened the folder so that no papers would be blown away. It turned out that he didn't have to worry, as the contents were all fastened with paper clips, the first paper being his uneven drawing of Tucker. The paper surface felt different from before against his fingertips, and he laughed at the bee-stung appearance of the dog as he flipped it to see the next paper.

Dear Will, began the cursive hand on it.

My sincerest apologies for this weekend's missed opportunity for yet an intriguing meeting. Enclosed within this folder are your sealed drawings – I assume you have already seen one – as well as a simple gift. I also took the liberty of placing the folder here with the assumption you would find it before the weather finds it fit to change.

While your summer mainly brings freedom, mine remains full of duties I must adhere to. However, while I am often inclined to agree with Horace on the subject of day-seizing, I implore you to put your trust in future meetings still.

This upcoming Saturday, for example – the 8th, I believe – I am hoping to see you again.

Below it was signed the single letter *H*, but even without that, Will already knew the sender. He had no idea who *Horace* was though, but it felt inconsequential to the letter as a whole – and he had at first glance of the word decided that he'd make sure to be by the river on the Saturday, the whole day if needed.

Below the letter was some of the other sketches he had been responsible for during their last meeting, and he looked through them with patience to calm the odd feeling of excitement building in his throat at reading Hannibal's message. The papers felt heavier than they'd seemed when he drew on them, but only mildly so. His clumsy description of Grandpa's handmade fly fish bait, the other attempts at drawing Tucker followed by other dogs he remembered, pointed antlers spawning from a conversation about the forest animals around them…

And then, the last paper, was Hannibal's and it was *distinctively* so – a piece much more detailed than anything Will had ever managed to draw, or seen anyone draw before at all. It depicted the view from the dock, as seen from the spot Hannibal had been seated at. The rocks on the opposite shore, the trees, the swirl of the waves. And on the right, the curly locks and worn t-shirt framing what Will immediately recognized as himself – but slightly from behind. To be frank, Will had never actually seen himself from that angle, but he just knew. The slight tearing in the seam at the back of the short sleeve, the hair – Hannibal had not only drawn him, but done it *really* well.

At the end of the day, there was little to no fish in his bucket on the way home, but the folder was pressed securely to his chest so that no papers would escape it. Perhaps, he thought when he snuck it past his dad into his bedroom and hid it, if Hannibal could in fact vanish like in a fairy-tale, he would at least have this to know that the older boy was real.

Chapter End Notes

More physical copies of Hannibal coming back in the next chapter again, I promise.

Sorry about the delay for this one, I have theses and things to write. Hopefully it is still enjoyable!

July 8th

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

"Who is Horace?" Will asked almost into the air when the dock behind him gave a light creak on the following Saturday, hoping to be right without turning to check. He was, and with a soft laugh, Hannibal sat down next to him. Navy-blue sleeves with thin darker stripes were folded up above his elbows, but any other signs of the heat affecting the older boy were left unseen.

"I take it you found the folder, then?" he asked, and met Will's upwards-wandering gaze with eyes that did not call the waves to their bidding this time. Will nodded in response, feeling relieved by this lack of overwhelming water. To be quite frank he wasn't sure what it meant, if anything at all.

"Yes", he eventually said to clarify his previous nodding, and then added, "Thank you. Your… your drawing was nice. You're real good."

It didn't begin to describe *how* nice it was, but he couldn't find the right words, and the ones he used seemed to be appreciated by the way Hannibal's lips curved. Will almost forgot his initial question, in favor for another array of them.

"How long have you been drawing? How do you do *that*?" he asked with a vague hand gesture towards the new pad of white papers Hannibal still held in a one-armed grip. It was a different kind of paper, and Will only knew because he'd looked at the ones in the folder enough times.

"I have been drawing – sketching more than painting – since I was very young, I admit", answered Hannibal and put his pad back behind him like how Will had done with his bucket and sandals. "It is as a good practice for the mind – if I sketch something enough times, I will eventually be able to replicate it at any point. It might become a constant state of mind for you if you do it for too long, though – willing yourself to save and savor each moment as it passes you, while still judging said moment for what it contains."

His eyes lingered over Will's face as he spoke in a way that had his skin tingling, as though it was aware that he was being observed and not just seen. The gaze, causing his skin to feel like it cracked and sprouted leaves as it passed slid down Will's cheek, to his neck and stopped at his shoulder. The bruises that caught his attention were yellowed, but still present.

"They have yet to bore, I assume?" he asked, and Will felt his cheeks flame into red as he nodded. It was only true after all; he had thought he would be at least safe down at the river, but then they had appeared behind him on the path again. Some rough shoves and a push that had him fall forwards onto the rocky dirt path left marks he'd explained away as *playing too wildly*.

He was pretty certain he couldn't convince Hannibal of that, though.

“It’s probably because we’re out of school to begin with”, he muttered and gripped harder around the fishing rod, eyes peeled at the cork and the stream it split.

“Did you do anything apart from just being that set them off, Will?”

Hannibal’s tone was so difficult to read; he was altogether difficult to read. The question that would so often sound accusatory was nowhere near that – just curious. Perhaps even a little distanced.

“Not really”, Will said, hesitating only for a moment before continuing. “But I know why they’re doing it. Or well, I understand why.”

Only now Hannibal retracted his hand from Will’s shoulder, the cool fingertips still feeling as though they lingered on his skin. He had turned towards him properly, and when Will looked up he noted the weak semblance of interest on his face.

“Then please, elaborate.”

“They all have something they want to undo or forget. Or something.” Will licked his lips, wanting to look over towards the cork again for safety, but found himself locked to the spark in the maroon eyes. “Jesse’s parents are separating and he thinks it’s his fault – it’s probably not, but he thinks so. Heather, her parents blame her for everything her little siblings do, at least according to herself. Travis has been in my position. Dennis just doesn’t want to be, so he tries hard to fit in.”

“This is all very in-depth, Will. Have these children spoken to you about these matters?”

“No, they haven’t”, he answered. Then the words came rolling faster than he knew how to stop them and he used new once he’d never actually used before. “It’s the little things. Like the way Jesse always g…glorifies his dad, he wants to… uh… appease him. Heather’s always loud and things, and super defensive whenever someone accuses her.”

He went quiet for a little bit and bit his lip, forcing his gaze away from Hannibal’s eyes, the waters of his mind rippling around his feet.

“The little things, you know? I just… I pick up on them. Dad says it’s bad.” An ache in his stomach had spread up his chest and now made his arms feel like lead. Telling people about his guesswork had never warranted any good responses – mostly it had been met with frowns and discomfort. A neighboring lady from a different town had quickly shoved him out through the door after he asked why she hit her children. A friend of Dad had done something bad and even Dad had gotten angry at him noting it.

“It’s fascinating”, said Hannibal, voice a murmur in the gentle hum of the stream, but audible nonetheless.

“You think so?” Will asked, maybe a little too hastily, turning back and meeting a smile.

“Yes. I would say your father is wrong on this – though he is possibly afraid. When a child turns out to be more able than their parent expected, it seems possible it would frighten a

regular parent. They are perhaps no longer the intelligence of the house, and they are unsure of how they are going to handle it."

"I don't think Dad's stupid", Will objected, and Hannibal shook his head.

"No, of course not. Your ability does not immediately guarantee a lack of intelligence on his part."

Will grew silent in response, and stared down at his hands, not sure what to think about the other's comments. Dad was definitely not stupid – he had taught Will all he could so far on the school subjects, filled him in where the classes he'd taken and those he'd arrived to contained holes. But he had never wanted to hear of the guesses.

"To answer your previous question", Hannibal began again next to him, moving to retrieve his pad of papers and opening it in front of himself. "Horace was a poet during the time of a certain Augustus, founder of the great Roman Empire. Though he wrote several verses and texts, people most often refer to that of *Carpe Diem*. You have heard it too, I am sure."

Will nodded, focusing on Hannibal's words instead of his own thoughts.

"I think I've heard people say it."

"Seize the day", Hannibal said, sounding amused. "Though as it stands in people's eyes, it could be used either as a cry to do all you can per each day, for it might be your last – or to spend the day to your own desires and wants, for the same reason."

"Don't trust that another day will come?" Will asked, and felt suddenly aware of how the rhythm and cadence of his speech was changing from when he spoke with his father, to be more closely aligned with the older boy. It felt odd, but not entirely uncomfortable.

"According to some, yes", Hannibal nodded, and the gentle scratching of a sharpened lead pencil made his voice seem even more soothing and calm than before. Will felt himself smile again, and moved the rod a little to hope the cork would end up somewhere more intriguing for the fish.

"Dad's probably on the first one. He's working all summer, he said."

"Then I most certainly hope you'll come here to join me on Saturdays. Perhaps I will have some openings on other days as well, if we're lucky."

"That'd be nice!" Will said, and meant it with all his heart.

They remained in a comfortable silence apart from the constant raspy noise of Hannibal's pencil. Despite Will's fingers increasingly beginning to itch with curiosity, he forced himself to not look over – nobody would want to have people stare at their work while they're doing it. Eventually, though, gnawing at his lower lip thoughtfully, he dared to turn towards him again.

"…Can… May I look at what you're drawing?"

Hannibal raised his light eyebrows and then smiled.

“Why of course.”

Will looked down at the uncovered paper, and saw the shape of a body seated on something akin to a stone bench – like the ones in the city park. The bench itself was covered by the outline of flowers, as was the grounds around and the walls behind the person, some in the thin arms, wrapped over his lap. They were in the foreground too, as if someone looked at the scene from slightly above. The wild curls of the person’s hair quickly made it clear who it was supposed to be.

“As I said before, I wish to draw all I want to remember”, Hannibal commented in the silence, as though it explained everything. And Will let it explain everything.

“It’s really pretty”, he almost whispered, as Hannibal begun to put more focus on the details of the flora, only now and then stopping to add more shade to a shirt-fold or correct the shape of Will’s closed eyes.

“Fittingly, these are known as Sweet Williams, a species of Dianthus. They must be expected and planted a year before they are to bloom. Though their life span is nearly as far from eternal as it could be, it’s likely based in the extravagance of their blooms. A grand sight, admittedly.”

Will didn’t know there were flowers of his namesake, and nodded in intrigue and fascination.

“I’m not sure if they’d fit me then”, he said however, and Hannibal shook his head softly.

“Certainly, they do. All that you already are will grow into something even more impressive once you come of an age to make use of it. As this Dianthus, the skills you nurture at this age will surely grow spectacularly strong at a later time. You’ll blossom from what you are now to what you will be – like a caterpillar through a chrysalis.”

The compliments in his metaphors did not go lost on Will, whose cheeks were flaming with embarrassment as well as pride over them.

“Are there any Hannibal’s?” he asked with a grin.

“Not to my knowledge, no”, Hannibal answered, humor evident in his voice. “Though I believe I would surround myself with these as well, instead, if I could. They bring in all means of life into a garden – bees, birds and butterflies all. Allegedly they also are seen as having some medicinal properties, edible as they are.”

Will found himself not caring for the cork and watched the steady hand create oddly realistic petals for being a black-and-white sketch, watched him correct the sketch-Will’s thin shoulders as the birds were added and almost flew into the picture.

There were so many flowers, too many flowers, but when Hannibal added even more it strangely enough became just right.

“I am intrigued”, the tall boy said, “by what are you going to become, sweet Will.”

Chapter End Notes

Because any of that's not unsettling at all, Hannibal. Not at all.

He returns, and so do his subjects of conversation!
I finally had some time to sit down and just pour out words so I hope you'll enjoy.
The comments and kudos and such have been making me want to continue for the longest time,
but finally offline life allowed it as well, which is nice. Thank you, sweet people, for all the encouraging words!

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!